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23 March 1961

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Pak-Afghan Quarrel

1. The attached memorandum covers this subject pretty well from an intelligence standpoint. Just after it was prepared, I learned from closely-held State cables (Rome 3513 and 3516) that Afghan Prime Minister Daud had suggested to Ambassador Harriman in Rome that the US offer its good offices in the Afghan-Pakistani dispute. This caused me to think at some length on whether or not a solution is possible. No sure-fire answer is readily apparent. However, I think there is some hope in the approach described below.

2. Before getting to this, there are a few key facts that must be borne in mind on this matter. The core of the Afghans' demands is some kind of recognition that they have an interest in the Pushtuns on the Pakistani side of the border. Culturally and historically, there is some foundation for this; legally and practically, there is very little. The Afghan demand has taken the

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form that the five or six million Pushtuns in Pakistan be given the chance to opt for an independent state of "Pushtunistan." The Pakistanis have steadfastly refused to recognize any Afghan interest, and have, of course, decided

State Dept. review completed

"Pashtunistan." Apart from all the legal and technical difficulties involved, the Paks have simply had no reason to do anything else. None of the discussions of the subject in the past have ever involved an Afghan quid for the Pakistani quo.

3. The US position on the quarrel has from the beginning been to take sides (although we have made it clear we recognize the existing international boundary) and to urge moderation and cooperation on both parties. Once before, (about 1949, I think) the US was formally involved in good offices but nothing came of it because of the essentially non-negotiable character of the two parties' positions: the Afghans insisting on recognition of their interest in Pakistan's Pashtuns; the Pakistanis refusing to admit such interest. In 1957-58, the US made a second major effort to ameliorate the situation. Side-skirting the main issue, we tried to promote a rapprochement between Pakistan and Afghanistan aimed at improving the atmosphere through a coordinated economic development program centering on a transit agreement to improve communications and transportation between the two countries. This did lessen tensions temporarily but since it did not come to grips with the actual issue, no lasting progress was made and we now have another major flare-up.

4. Now, I suggest that if we are to do anything about this problem, as in the case of Cyprus, we will have to deal with

the issue involved rather than merely urging moderation and cooperation. The principal problem in dealing with the issue has always been the absence of anything to offer the Pakis to encourage them to negotiate with the Afghans. An answer to the problem may lie in the creation of a joint commission with responsibility for certain functions in the most underdeveloped and unsettled Pushtun areas on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. Each government would retain sovereignty over its own territory. Each would be responsible for law and order in its own area, but certain aspects of economic and social development would be handled by the commission, which could be composed equally of Afghan officials, Pakistani officials, and representatives of the Pushtun tribes resident on both sides of the border.

5. It seems to me that there is some hope that both sides would accept a proposal along these lines if properly presented. Leaders of both countries have long been aware of the cultural and historic kinship of their peoples, and, surprisingly, the idea of confederation of the two countries has been received with considerable sympathy, though its utopian nature is generally recognized. Neither side is anxious to have an armed clash but neither can back down with honor under present circumstances.

6. Kabul could accept such a commission as recognition of their interest in the Pushtuns in Pakistan and as pretty

much what they meant as "Pashtunistan" all along. The Pakistani's, whose ultimate aim is integration of the tribal areas into Pakistan, could present the joint commission as a useful and necessary device for achieving integration while reducing Afghan influence and aiding their Pashtun brothers resident in Afghanistan, all at the same time. A time limit could be put upon the commission, upon expiration of which both sides could decide whether to maintain, liquidate or expand the arrangement. Assuming that both parties would be willing at least to consider the arrangement, the least that would be accomplished would be a delay in the current build-up of tensions.

7. As to the technique of launching such a scheme, it seems to me that some "kite-flying" would be useful before having the respective US ambassadors -- or even some special ambassador -- propose this new and somewhat radical approach directly to the top officials of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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Mr. Ament:

Sherman:

I have sent copies of this
(with the Memo to DCI on Push-
tunistan attached) to DD/P
[redacted] and Komer. This was
read to the Board in a rump
session after Board approval
of the Memo to the DCI.

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